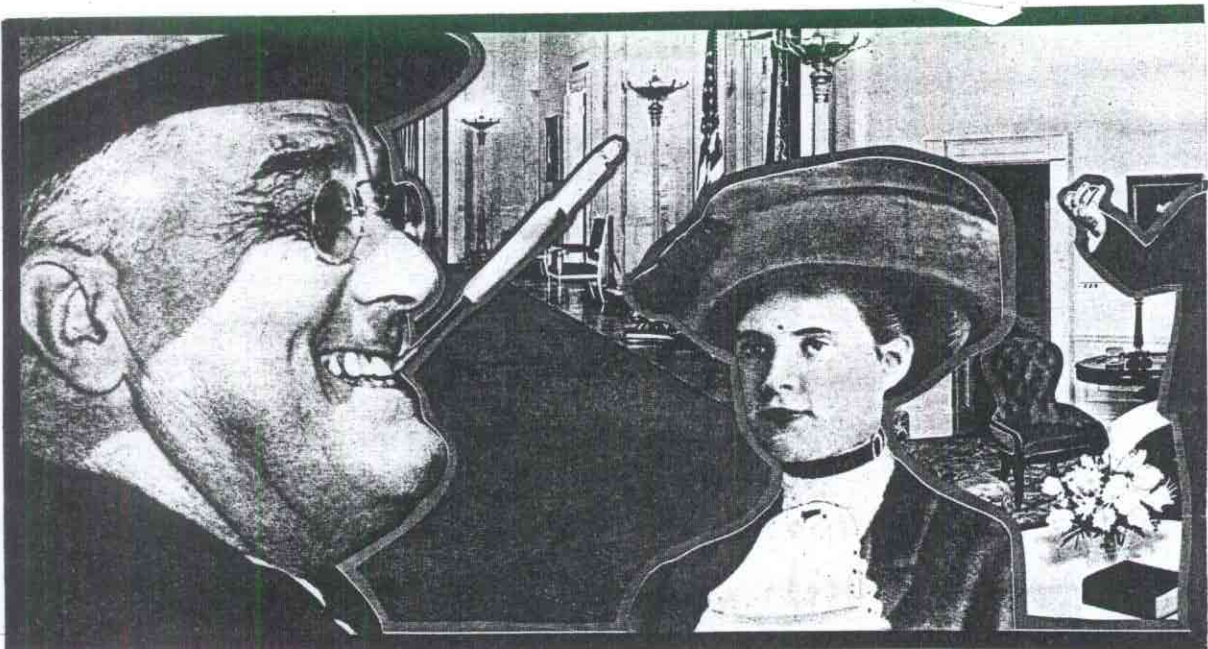




Upstairs at the White House

By J. B. West With Mary Lynn Kotz

From Franklin D. Roosevelt to Richard M. Nixon, J.B. West has been involved in running the White House. As assistant to the Chief Usher from 1941 to 1957 and Chief Usher until 1969, when he retired, he had a view of the First Families denied most of us. The following excerpts are from his recently published memoir, Upstairs at the White House, written with Mary Lynn Kotz (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., New York).

Roosevelt

The most colorful visitor to appear at the wartime White House was Winston Churchill. His living habits are still the subject of White House staff gossip, and every visitor who sleeps in the Queen's Room is compared to the crusty old Prime Minister.

He first arrived secretly, just before Christmas in 1941. When the Secret Service passed the word that from two until three o'clock in the afternoon of December 22 no one was to leave his office, no one

was to enter the halls, we knew someone important was coming. We had been told to prepare for a VIP, but we didn't know who. It didn't take long for the cigar smoke to announce Mr. Churchill's presence.

Mrs. Roosevelt had arranged for him to stay in the Lincoln bedroom, then located off the West Hall, the favorite of most male guests. However, he didn't like the bed, so he tried out all the beds and finally selected the rose suite at the east end of the second floor.

The staff did have a little difficulty adjusting to Mr. Churchill's way of living. The first thing in the morning, he declined the customary orange juice and called for a drink of Scotch. His staff, a large entourage of aides and a valet, followed suit. The butlers wore a path in the carpet carrying trays laden with brandy to his suite.

We got used to his "jumpsuit," the extraordinary one-piece uniform he wore every day, but the servants never quite got over seeing him naked in his room when they'd go up to serve brandy. It was the jumpsuit or nothing. In his room, Mr. Churchill wore no clothes at all most of the time during the day.

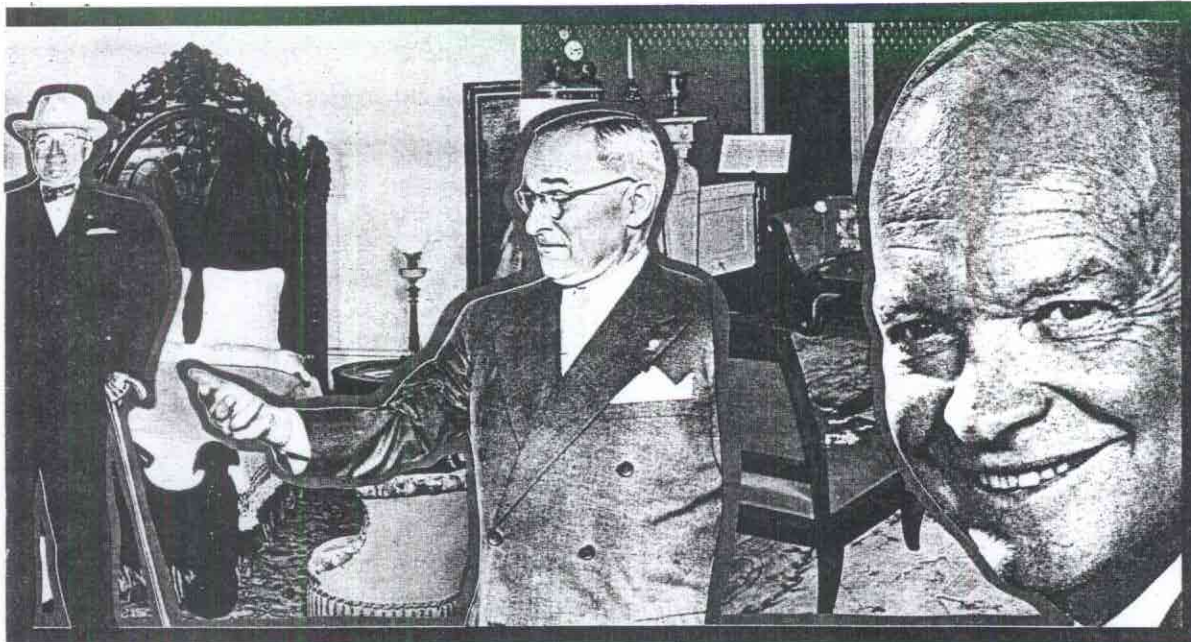
One day the valet wheeled President Roosevelt up to the rose room, opened the door, and there stood his unclothed guest. The Prime Minister didn't mind, but the President did. He quickly backed out into the hall until Mr. Churchill could get something on.

In 1943, as the war raged on, the White House opened its doors to two most unusual official guests—Madame Chiang Kaishek of China, and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov. The staff was nearly floored by each of them.

On her first day in the White House, President and Mrs. Roosevelt received Madame Chiang for formal tea in the West Sitting Hall. Knowing how the Chinese are about tea, Mrs. Roosevelt had secured some very special Chinese tea, supposed to be a hundred years old, for the occasion.

When the China doll, as Mr. Crim called her, sipped daintily without comment, Mrs. Roosevelt couldn't resist telling her about it.

"In my country, tea kept so long is used only for medicinal purposes," Madame



Collages by Allen Appel

Chiang replied sweetly.

Madame Chiang, who proved not to be so democratic as her publicity had us believe, traveled with an entourage of 40, many of whom were stashed away on the third floor, the others at the Chinese Embassy. With her on the second floor were her personal maid, and her closest aides, her niece and nephew, the Kungs. At first, we thought they both were nephews.

Miss Kung dressed like a man, and the White House valets, thinking she was Mr. Kung, went into her room to unpack her bags and help her undress. In a short time, they were in the Usher's office. "Your Mr. Kung is a girl," Caesar the valet told the horrified Mr. Crim, who immediately sent two maids up to attend to her needs.

But even the President was fooled, and called her "my boy" very expansively at dinner. ("I call all young people 'my boy,'" he tried to cover.)

Miss Kung proved to be quite a nuisance for the First Lady. Mrs. Roosevelt called down to the Usher's office, exasperated. "Mr. Crim, can you please explain to Miss Kung that she is to call you if she needs anything? She pops into my room a dozen times during the day.

The tiny, delicate-looking Madame Chiang stayed at the White House nine days, and the White House maids were never so happy to see anybody leave. "Mrs. Generalissimo" brought her own silk sheets with her, which had to be laundered by hand every day, and stitched back inside the heavy quilted sleeping bag she had brought along from China.

Caesar, the same valet who unpacked Miss Kung, rushed into the Usher's office the day Mr. Molotov arrived. His hands were trembling.

"He's got a gun in his suitcase," the valet whispered excitedly. "What shall I do?"

Mr. Crim's eyes opened wide. That was a piece of hardware most unwelcome in the White House. But delicate international conferences were going on in the President's study. The Chief Usher called the Secret Service, explaining the situation, then hung up the phone. He turned to Caesar, who was still waiting.

"Just hope he doesn't use it on you!"

Quite often, but only when Mrs. Roosevelt was out of town, the President invited his friend Mrs. Lucy Mercer Rutherford to the White House. An attractive, vivacious woman in her forties, she'd arrive at the front door, the north entrance. We'd watch her hurry up the steps, to be escorted by an usher to the second floor. The butler would serve tea, close the door, and leave the President and Mrs. Rutherford alone. After about an hour's time, the President rang for the doorman to escort her back to her car.

In good weather, the President enjoyed taking a drive in the Virginia countryside with his little dog, Fala, and the Secret Service guard. One day Mr. Roosevelt directed the driver to go along a certain wooded, dirt road. Suddenly, he ordered the driver to stop. "There seems to be a lady walking along the road. Let us ask her

if she needs a ride," the President directed.

The fourth time this incident occurred, the Secret Service men following the President began to be aware that the same lady, on the same country road, always needed a ride. They'd take the long route to her destination, giving the President and his passenger a scenic spin in the big car. One of the agents mentioned those drives to the Usher's office, wondering if any of us might know the mysterious lady. So one day Wilson Searles talked the agent into letting him accompany them on an excursion. When he saw Searles in the Secret Service car, Mr. Roosevelt laughed.

"I see it's your turn to find out what's going on!" the President said. The lady was Mrs. Rutherford.

Truman

On April 22, 1945 Franklin D. Roosevelt died and Harry Truman became President.

At the end of the work day, the Trumans had cocktails in the West Hall, which is the family sitting room. One drink each, before dinner. But it took a while to learn their tastes. Shortly after they moved in, the First Lady rang for the butler. Fields came up, tray in hand.

"We'd like two old-fashioned, please," she requested.

Fields, who often moonlighted at Washington's most elegant parties, prided himself on being an excellent bartender.

"Yes, Ma'am, he answered.

In no time flat, he was back with the order, in chilled glasses, with appetizing fruit slices and a dash of bitters. Mrs. Tru-



man tasted the drink, thanked him, but made no other comment.

The next evening she rang for Fields. "Can you make the old-fashioned a little drier?" she said. "We don't like them so sweet."

Fields tried a new recipe, and again she said nothing.

But the next morning she told me, "They make the worst old-fashioned here I've ever tasted! They're like fruit punch."

The next evening, Fields, his pride hurt, dumped two big splashes of bourbon over the ice and served it to Mrs. Truman.

She tasted the drink. Then she beamed. "Now that's the way we like our old-fashioned!"

When Mrs. Truman left to take her mother to Independence for the summer, the President was disconsolate. He'd pick at his food if he had to eat alone, and often, on the spur of the moment, he'd call over a crony for an evening's visit in the drawing room. Solitary thinking was not his favorite approach to solving problems. He liked a verbal sounding board. And he liked company.

The President had the poker game come to the White House only once, in his earliest days in office. We'd even bought a special poker table. However, he preferred to spend his evenings alone with his wife. But when Mrs. Truman was out of town, the President returned to the poker game.

When she returned that fall, the President was jubilant. He met her train at Union Station and they came back arm in arm.

"It's good to have the real boss back," he beamed at me. "But we'll have to mind our p's and q's around here from now on."

Mr. and Mrs. Truman were so obviously glad to see each other, butlers kept grinning as they went back and forth through the house.

After a light dinner in the President's library, they sent the maids downstairs.

The next morning, I was in Mrs. Tru-

man's study at nine, as usual.

She scanned the day's menu, then, in a rather small, uncomfortable voice, she said:



"Mr. West, we have a little problem."

"Yes," I waited.

She cleared her throat, demurely.

"It's the President's bed. Do you think you can get it fixed today?"

"Why certainly," I said. "What's the matter?"

"Two of the slats broke down during the night."

"I'll see that it has all new slats put in," I said hurriedly. "It's an old antique bed anyway, and if he'd like a newer one..."

"Oh, no," she said. "This one is just fine."

But the Trumans certainly aren't antiquies, I thought to myself. The President's wife was blushing like a young bride.

It was during the Truman years that the White House was found to be falling down and the President and his wife moved across the street to Blair House. There an event happened that changed the shape of the Presidency.

At one in the afternoon, punctual to the second, President Truman walked into Blair House, nodding to Mr. Crim and me, as we sat in our little office just inside the front door.

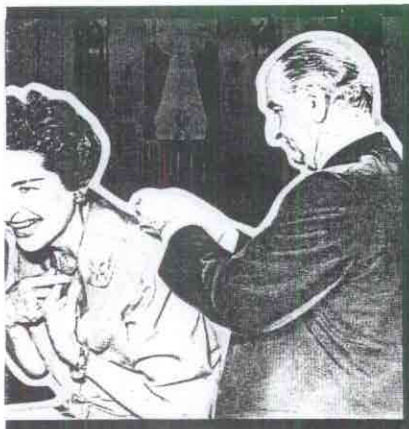
The President went upstairs for a few moments, then came down to lunch with Mrs. Truman and Mrs. Wallace. Things were quiet, sleepy...

I checked the Usher's log as Mr. Truman went back upstairs to take his nap. The President had one appointment for the afternoon, a ceremony at Arlington Cemetery.

"You can sleep until 2:30," I joked to Mr. Crim. "His car won't be here until then."

Mr. Crim laughed. "I'm afraid I might not wake up," he said.

I looked out the window—Blair House, like most period townhouses, is right on the street—at Officer Birdzell, dressed in his winter uniform, standing on the sidewalk.



"I bet he'd like to be in his shirtsleeves today," I said.

Mr. Crim and I were sitting in the office just inside the front door with the window open, because it was so unseasonably warm outside. The house was so quiet, the day so close, it was a struggle to stay awake.

Suddenly a shattering noise brought us both to our feet.

"That's gunfire!" Mr. Crim exclaimed as we ran to the window.

I saw the White House policeman Davison and Secret Service agent Boring, their pistols drawn and shooting, running down the sidewalk from the police box, at the east end of the house. They were shooting at somebody near the front door of Blair House!

I ran out to the entrance hall and found the front door wide open.

Wade, the doorman, was just standing there, staring at a man in a dark striped suit, who was firing at the policeman.

"Close the door," I yelled and wheeled around to get at the open windows, when I saw Mrs. Truman coming down the stairs. "What's happening?" she asked worriedly.

"There's a shooting outside," I said. "Somebody is shooting at the police."

Eyes wide, she turned quickly and walked back upstairs.

When I saw Officer Birdzell, who'd been standing out front only a few moments before, fall to the ground bleeding, I realized we were under attack. I had no idea how many gunmen there were or whether there'd be an invasion of Blair House. Then city police and Secret Service agents appeared in droves, and the shooting suddenly stopped.

The man in the striped suit lay on the bottom doorstep, another man was crumpled in a heap inside the hedge in front of Lee House. Officer Coffelt was dead, and Officer Downs was seriously wounded.

"Get me a priest," Downs gasped, as they dragged him into Miss Walker's office at Lee House. I called St. Stephen's Church

and asked a priest to meet him at Emergency Hospital. Fields and I stayed with the wounded, bleeding man until the ambulance arrived. There had obviously been an attempt to kill the President. But who—and why?

One of the would-be assassins was killed. The other lived to explain that they were Puerto Rican nationalists, who had tried to kill the President because they hoped to set off a revolution in the United States so that their country could declare independence.

It was a frightening experience for all of us to see people murdered just a few feet away, as they tried to invade the residence to kill the President of the United States.

But we were astounded minutes later to see the President come downstairs and leave by the back alley door to make a speech, unveiling a statue of a British war hero, at Arlington Cemetery.

If the killers had arrived at 2:50, instead of 2:20, the President would have been walking out the front door of Blair House—a frighteningly easy target.

From that moment on, the Secret Service, the police, and the President were never allowed to forget the possibility of a madman's bullet. No longer could President Truman walk across the street to his office nor take his constitutional. From then on, his car always picked him up at the back alley of Blair House, drove him around the back to the southwest gate of the White House to his west wing office. West Executive Avenue, between the White House and the old State-War-Navy Department building, was closed to traffic forever. Pedestrians no longer could stroll on the sidewalks in front of Blair House. We began to know the feeling of life behind a barricade, a feeling that never again left us.

Eisenhower

Mamie Eisenhower was almost as used to being in charge as her husband, and, says West, "She established her White House command immediately."

There'd be no separate bedrooms for the Eisenhowers. Mary Geneva Doud Eisenhower made that perfectly clear her first morning in the White House, after she'd spent the night in Bess Truman's narrow, single bed in the little room known as the First Lady's dressing room.

"I'd like to make some changes right away," she said, lighting a cigarette and surveying her new quarters.

"First of all, I'm not going to sleep in this little room. This is a dressing room, and I want it made into my dressing room. The big room"—she indicated with a sweep of her arm the mauve-and-gray chamber next door, where Mrs. Truman had sat listening to baseball games—"will be our bedroom!"

"Prior to the Roosevelts, it had been used that way," Mr. Crim ventured.

"Good!" Mrs. Eisenhower went on. "We need a 'king-sized' bed—with a mattress

twice as wide as a single bed—and we'd like it as soon as possible, please." Taking a pencil from her bedside table, she quickly designed a double headboard for the bed, to be upholstered and tufted in the same pink fabric as the easy chair in Margaret Truman's sitting room, and a dust-ruffle to match.

The bed must have been an immediate success. The morning after it arrived in a White House truck from New York, Mr. Crim and I accompanied the butler bringing Mrs. Eisenhower's breakfast tray.

"Come in, come in," the First Lady sang out, as Rose Woods opened the door to the new bedroom.

She was nestled in the big bed, propped up against half a dozen pillows, deep in conversation on the white bedside telephone. Waving gaily at Mr. Crim and me to take a seat, she said, still talking to her friend, "... And I've just had the first good night's sleep I've had since we've been in the White House. Our new bed finally got here, and now I can reach over and pat Ike on his old bald head anytime I want to!"

"I have but one career, and its name is Ike," Mrs. Eisenhower once announced. But as far as we were concerned, she made a career of the President's house.

On the wall opposite the elevator, she nailed a little plaque, "Bless This House." It had hung in twenty-eight previous homes, from a one-room apartment to a French mansion, and now in the B. Altman White House.

She never treated the mansion as government property, it was hers. And she took such fastidious care of it that we almost believed it was hers. She became truly alarmed if things went wrong.

One such problem rated a 7 a.m. phone call to the housekeeper.

"Come up to my bedroom as soon as the President goes to his office!" Mrs. Eisenhower ordered. Miss Walker, alarmed, stopped by my office first. "Perhaps you'd better come up with me," she said. "It sounds like disaster."

It was the earliest we'd ever seen Mrs. Eisenhower. And she wasn't in bed.

But the bed was a mess. All over the sheets, covers, pink dust-ruffle, headboard, everything, were big black spots—or, to be exact, dabs and blotches and swipes of indigo.

"What on earth can we do?" the First Lady wailed.

Miss Walker began jerking the sheets off the bed herself. "I'll take these down to the laundry room to soak, and one of the maids will bring up some spot-remover for the rest," she said.

Once the housekeeper had disappeared with the soiled linens, Mrs. Eisenhower began to explain.

"You see, my nose was all stopped up,"

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she began, "and I had a jar of Vicks on my bedside table. So during the night when I woke up, I reached over to put some in my nostrils. Well, it seemed to just get drier, instead of moister," she went on, "so I kept applying more and more. I didn't want to wake up Ike, so I didn't turn on the light. Then this morning, I discovered that I was using ink to cure my cold."

She had begun the conversation very earnestly, but now, knowing that it could all be set right, she began to smile.

"But you should have seen me," she laughed. "Black and blue all over — and the President, too."

I held down the chuckle that rose up in my throat. The President and the First Lady, in all their dignity, covered in ink.

"I don't think anything is permanently damaged," I assured her. "I'm sure it will all come out in the wash."

"Now don't you tell a soul," she admonished, still laughing.

"Certainly not," I promised, and beat a hasty retreat. Not since Harry Truman's four-poster broke down had I heard such a good bedtime story.

Kennedy

Jacqueline Kennedy whispered. Or so I thought, at first. Actually, she spoke so softly that one was forced to listen intently, forced to focus on her face and respond to her direct, compelling eyes. There was wonder in those eyes, determination, humor and—sometimes—vulnerability.

When she looked around a crowded room as if searching for the nearest exit, people assumed that she was shy, uncertain. I don't think she was ever shy. It was merely her method of studying the situation: memorizing the room, or assessing the people in it. She spoke no small talk — no "I'm so very glad to meet you and what does your husband do?" She limited her conversation merely to what, in her opinion, mattered.

Her interests were wide, however, as was her knowledge, and she had a subtle, ingenious way of getting things accomplished.

I soon learned that Mrs. Kennedy's wish, murmured with a "Do you think . . ." or "Could you please . . ." was as much a command as Mrs. Eisenhower's "I want this done immediately."

Mrs. Eisenhower had called me to her bedroom one morning several weeks after the 1960 election.

"I've invited Mrs. Kennedy for a tour of the house at noon on December 9," she said. "Please have the rooms in order, but no servants on the upstairs floors. And I plan to leave at 1:30, so have my car ready."

"Mrs. Kennedy's Secret Service agent phoned from the hospital this morning," I told the outgoing First Lady. "She asked

that we have a wheelchair for her when she arrives."

At that moment, Mrs. Kennedy was still at Georgetown Hospital, recovering from her Caesarian surgery of November 25, when John F. Kennedy, Jr., was born.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Eisenhower frowned. "I wanted to take her around alone."

The thought of Mamie Eisenhower, the grandest of the First Ladies, pushing a wheelchair through the corridors of the White House — especially when the passenger had been a political enemy — was too much for me.

"I'll tell you what . . ." her carefully manicured fingernails drummed the night table. "We'll get a wheelchair, but put it behind a door somewhere, out of sight. It will be available if she asks for it," she said.



Photograph by Matthew Lewis

On the morning of December 9, the house was spruced up in its Christmas best, the wheelchair hidden in a closet beside the elevator, and I was waiting at the south entrance to meet the future First Lady.

Just before noon, the Secret Service agent who had been assigned to Mrs. Kennedy drove a dark blue station wagon into the circular driveway. She was sitting in the front seat, next to him.

Harriston, the silent, genial doorman, opened the door for her.

"Thank you," she smiled at him, and stepped out.

I was struck by how young she appeared. Dressed in a dark coat, wearing hat and gloves, she could have been a young Congressman's wife paying an obligatory call. She was taller than I had realized, as tall as I, even in her low heels. Very thin, it seemed to me, and quite pale.

"I'm Mr. West, the Chief Usher," I introduced myself.

"I'm Jacqueline Kennedy," she whispered. As if I didn't know.

She stepped, a bit hesitantly I thought, into the Diplomatic Reception Room, looked around at the walls, sofas, and rug, and, without saying another word, walked with me through the green-carpeted hallway toward the elevator. Her wide, uncertain eyes took in everything around her, and I could tell she was somewhat ill-at-ease.

"Mrs. Eisenhower is waiting upstairs," I explained, as we entered the elevator.

As the elevator door opened to the second floor, Jacqueline Kennedy took a deep, audible breath.

Mrs. Eisenhower stood in the center hall, a tiny figure under the high ceilings, surrounded by the beige expanse of hall. And very much in command.

"Mrs. Kennedy," I announced. Mrs. Eisenhower did not come forward.

As I escorted the young woman across the room to meet her formidable hostess, I was very much aware that neither lady had looked forward to this meeting.

"Hello, Mrs. Kennedy," Mrs. Eisenhower gave a nod and extended her hand in her most gracious meet-the-visitor pose. "I do hope you are feeling much better now. And how is the baby?"

I turned and left them, and waited in my office for a call for the wheelchair, a call that never came. At 1:30 on the dot, the two buzzers rang, indicating First Lady descending, and I dashed to the elevator.

The two women walked out the south entrance, where their cars were waiting. After the goodbyes and thank-yous, Mrs. Eisenhower stepped regally into the back seat of her Chrysler limousine and disappeared, off to her card game. Mrs. Kennedy walked slowly over to her three-year-old station wagon. As I caught up with her, to give her blueprints and photographs of the rooms, I saw pain darken her face.

"Could you please send them to Palm Beach for me?" she asked. "We're going there to rest until Inauguration Day."

Two months later, as we were tromping around the third floor, Mrs. Kennedy suddenly turned to me.

"Mr. West, did you know that my doctor ordered a wheelchair the day I first went around the White House?" she asked.

"Yes, I did," I answered.

She looked bewildered.

"Then why didn't you have it for me? I was so exhausted after marching around this house for two hours that I had to go back to bed for two whole weeks!"

She stared into my eyes, searching for an explanation.

"Well," I answered carefully, "it was certainly there, waiting for you. Right behind the closet door next to the elevator. We were waiting for you to request it."

To my surprise, she giggled. "I was too scared of Mrs. Eisenhower to ask," she whispered. From that moment, I never saw Jacqueline Kennedy uncertain again.

The Chief Usher is personnel officer for the mansion, which makes life simpler for the President, but probably makes it rather frustrating for people who work for the President. For they no longer work for the family, they work for the White House. As

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manager of the household staff, I was responsible for hiring—and firing. And through the years, I found that the First Families' personal servants took more delicate handling than those on the regular White House staff.

I discovered the sensitivity of President Kennedy's political antennae as I carried out "the West plan" to relieve Julius of his job. The morning I assigned Julius to his guest room on the third floor, I met the President at the elevator, and walked with him to his west wing office.

"Mr. President, I have released Julius Spessert from the kitchen today, because Mrs. Kennedy would like to have a pastry chef," I informed him. "Could you give him an autographed picture?"

"Sure, I'd be glad to," the President answered. Then he frowned. "But aren't you afraid he might want to write something?"

"No, he doesn't know enough to write," I replied.

Several days later, Mrs. Kennedy called me to the second floor. "Mr. West, I've had some statements drawn up by my attorney. Do you think it's all right for the employees to sign a pledge that they won't write anything about their experiences in the White House?"

I was taken aback a bit. "I'll certainly check on it," I said and I telephoned her attorney, James McInerney, to check out the legal implications. In effect, the pledge was purely psychological, he explained. "Legally, it really has no force of effect."

The attorney had drawn up the statement "to conform to Mrs. Kennedy's requirements and those of the Presidential Office," and he had also written Mrs. Kennedy a warning that "if publicly disclosed, the agreement may be falsely construed as a further advance in the area of executive privilege (of non-disclosures), which had come under attack by the congressional Freedom of Information Committees."

So, under the instruction of Mrs. Kennedy, I had the household employees sign the pledge. I assume the President, himself, asked his own

staff.

As the lawyer warned, the pledge did come under attack. Pierre Salinger, the President's press secretary, let it slip out at a press conference, and newspapers across the country went up in smoke about the White House muzzling its employees. Pierre, who protested lamely that "we just felt that it is a step to ensure that the President's wife will have privacy," was besieged by newsmen.

And the President, who had just squeaked by in the election, was in a tight spot. He called me from the west wing.

"Mr. West, may I come to see you in your office?"

"Certainly, Mr. President," I answered, startled.

President Kennedy strode in, looking so official I all but saluted.

"I want you to help me, Mr. West," he began. "This 'pledge' business is causing a lot of trouble. Would you take the blame for it?"

"I did ask the staff to sign it, Mr. President," I answered.

"Good. We'll put out a statement saying it was your idea, and you initiated it. It will look more official, and less of a personal thing coming from you."

Johnson

When the Johnsons arrived in the White House, the President took an immediate dislike to his shower.

On Monday, December 9, Airman Paul Glynn, who'd been assigned to the White House as the President's valet, phoned me just as I walked into my office. "The President wants the Usher to please meet him at the ground-floor elevator landing."

The President stepped off the elevator. "Mr. West, if you can't get that shower of mine fixed, I'm going to have to move back to The Elms." He didn't sound as if he were joking.

There had been no complaints from the Kennedys. And everything in the house had been doublechecked by the engineers after Mrs. Kennedy moved out, as is usual

for a change of tenants. I couldn't imagine what had gone wrong.

"It doesn't have enough pressure," he complained. "It's a terrible shower, that's what it is. Now my shower at The Elms..." he went on to describe the special, multi-nozzled fixture that could direct spray up, down, sideways, wide, narrow, and powerful. Then he repeated, "If you can't get it fixed, I'll just move back to The Elms." And without a smile, he turned on his heel and walked away.

Immediately we charged upstairs to check the shower. Nothing seemed to be wrong except that it wasn't what he was used to.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Johnson called, asking me to come to the second floor. She was seated in the Queen's sitting room, a small room with one door.

"I guess you've been told about the shower," she said.

"Yes ma'am," I smiled.

She smiled back. "Anything that's done here, or needs to be done, remember this: my husband comes first, the girls second, and I will be satisfied with what's left."

Out to The Elms we went, with the White House engineer and plumbers, to study the shower. It was an unusual one, but by contacting the manufacturer we felt sure that it could be duplicated. Not so. Word came down from the second floor that the replacement we had installed just didn't work the same. Out it came. Before the second installation, we invited engineers from the factory to look at The Elms' bathroom, to provide an exact duplication. They, of course, jumped at the opportunity to custom-build a shower for the President of the United States.

But shower number three wouldn't do either. Nor number four, nor number five. The problem was water pressure. We even put a special water tank in the stairwell closet, with a pump of its own, just for Mr. Johnson's shower. The Park Service was called in. Rex Scouten, now the White House liaison officer there, jumped into the shower in his bathing trunks to test the pressure. It was strong enough for Rex, but not for the President. We kept designing, redesigning, tearing out, installing, and fooling with that shower until Lyndon Johnson moved out.

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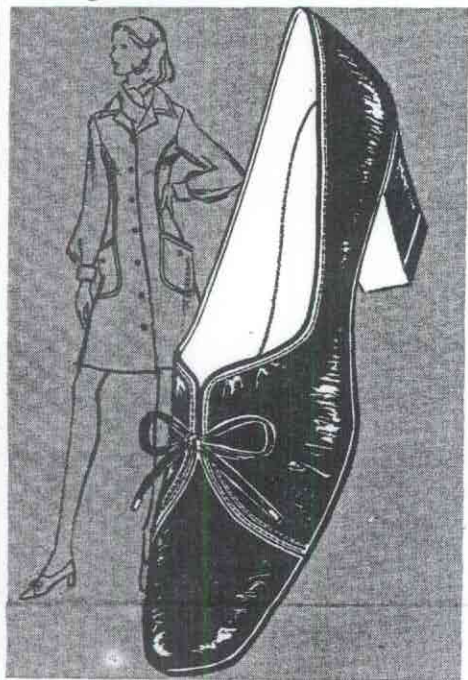


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West, from page 29

of the White House. Despite all the talk of savings in electricity, we spent thousands and thousands of dollars, not counting the man-hours, trying to build a shower to please him. It was the strongest, most elaborate shower we'd ever had, with about six different nozzles at different heights, directing spray at every part of the body.

The White House was nearly always full of people. There were droves of house guests—the President's Aunt Olivee and Aunt Josefa, Uncle Huffman Baines, Becky Bobbitt, various Texas friends, friendly governors and their families, famous Americans, schoolgirl friends of Lynda and Luci. The second and third floors were more "open house" than they'd been since the Roosevelt's days.

But there was one relative the President always kept track of.

At one point, the White House served as a long-term way station for Sam Houston Johnson, the President's high-spirited brother whose exploits sometimes gained publicity that bothered President Johnson. At one point, Sam Houston lived on the third floor for months. His principal activity was clipping newspapers, which the President told him would be useful for a future political campaign. It seemed, in fact, as if Sam Houston was under some sort of house arrest. At any rate, a Secret Service agent kept a log of his movements and visitors, and his contact with the world was pretty much limited to long conversations with Assistant Usher Nelson Pierce.

I'll never forget the night that Sam Houston brought light into the White House.

The President's sometime tenant had been told, in no uncertain terms, to observe the "electricity-saving" black-outs at the White House. One evening, when President and Mrs. Johnson had been out, they returned late at night to a pitch-dark mansion. Not a light on in the place. They groped their way to the elevator, got off on the second floor and saw, at the end of the hall, only a dim flicker of light.

It was Sam Houston, working at a desk, with only one small candle.

Nixon

The only initial change was the President's bedroom.

"Take out the big canopied bed and put in a simple double bed," Mrs. Nixon requested. We went to the storehouse, and there we found President Truman's old bed, the one that also had been in the room during the Eisenhower Administration, but seldom was used by the President then.

The First Lady liked Mrs. Johnson's bedroom.

"I'll have to have a room of my own," she confided to me in her mellow, throaty voice. Nobody could sleep with Dick. He wakes up during the night, switches on the light, speaks into his tape recorder or takes notes—it's impossible," she laughed.

But although the new President kept two dictaphones by his bedside, he quickly got rid of most of the electronic equipment, wiring, and recordings in Mr. Johnson's bedroom.

On a first tour around the living quarters, President Nixon peeked underneath the oversized four-poster bed Presidents Kennedy and Johnson had used.

"What on earth is all this?" he asked, amazed at the cat's cradle of electric wires, all tangled on the floor.

I explained that they were telephone connections, from the elaborate, console phone system of dozens of direct lines that Mr. Johnson had used, remote control wires to the television sets, tape-recording devices, and heaven knows what else.

"I don't want any of that under here," Mr. Nixon told me. "Take it all out, whatever it is. All I need is one line to the operator. She can find anyone else for me."

We took out all the phone extensions from the bathrooms, the West Hall, and the dining room. The three television sets went, too, right away. And the Rube Goldberg shower. Mr. Johnson had proudly pointed out that shower to his successor, describing its pleasures in great detail.

"Please have the shower heads all changed back to normal pressure," the new President requested after the first blast of Johnson-strength spray had almost knocked him right out of the bathroom.